

How to build an Unlimited Play Playground

Congratulations on taking the first step towards building an inclusive playground. Your dedication and determination will help give all children an opportunity to play together.

This guide is intended to help you realize your dream of building a playground where differences are celebrated, limitations are forgotten.

If you are serious about building an Unlimited Play playground, your first step should be to write down what inspired you to build a playground for all children. Your desire to build an all inclusive playground will be challenged during this process and you will want to remember your original inspiration.

Part of building an Unlimited Play playground is to try and be as inclusive to as many people as possible. Think of it as a way to equalize play opportunity for everyone. If you go to most “accessible” playgrounds built today, and you will find almost all of these playgrounds are labeled “accessible” simply because they meet ADA standards. While building to ADA standards is a good first step (and required by law), it is not nearly enough if you want to build a truly inclusive playground. Let me help you understand the difference between building an ADA compliant playground and an Unlimited Play playground.

Here are just a few examples of a minimum standard ADA playground compared to an all-inclusive Unlimited Play playground:

Mobility Limitations

Take a trip to any ADA accessible playground in your area. You will find almost all of these playgrounds meet ADA standards for mobility impaired individuals by including a transfer ramp. Transfer ramps involve steps from the ground up to a triangular platform on one side, a handhold and an open edge - about the height of a seat - on another side, and typically another set of stairs leading up to the rest of the playground structure on the third side. These transfer ramps work by requiring that anyone using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair or walker, leave their device behind and pull themselves out of their wheelchair onto the transfer platform and then up the stairs and onto the playground equipment. Please think about how often you have seen an individual pull themselves out of a wheelchair and across a playground structure. For most children this is not only demoralizing to be forced to crawl as friends run by, but can be a huge safety hazard with a high potential to be stepped on or tripped over.

Unlimited Play will never require individuals to leave their mobility device behind to access any elevated play structure. Ramping must be provided throughout all structures. Elevated berms and walls on the edge of the playground can be built to help reduce the need for extensive

ramping and still allow structures to be tall enough to provide fun climbing, sliding, and imaginary play.

Temperature Regulation

The need for shade or water play features is not something that ADA even addresses, yet is an essential part of any playground for those with sensitivity to the sun or temperature regulation difficulties. Often people, especially those with disabilities, have a hard time regulating their temperature. This makes it difficult to stay out and play very long. Adding both shade and water play not only provides relief for all of us, but allows those dealing with temperature regulation issues or sensitivity to the sun to cool off and thus stay out and play longer.

Hearing Impairments

Have you ever gone down a plastic slide? They can be found at almost all playgrounds. When you get to the bottom, your hair stands on end and when you touch your friend or the metal pole of the playground structure...ZAP. You guessed it - static electricity. Not that big a deal right? It doesn't really hurt. Now imagine you are a child with a hearing impairment using a cochlear implant. Cochlear implants are external devices mounted on the outside of the ear and head that help amplify sound. They require electric calibration unique to each individual. An electric shock to someone using these implants can cause real damage, usually requiring a trip to the audiologist for recalibration. That same innocuous "zap" is now a big deal. The repairs can cost up to \$1,000 and can force a child to go days without hearing. How easy would it be to include a few non-plastic slides such as stainless steel or roller slides? Yet you rarely see these alternatives. These non-plastic slides do not pose the same risk of static electricity and therefore give children with cochlear implants an option to still play on slides. Although this issue is commonly known, there is no current requirement to provide any metal slides on public playgrounds. Unlimited play requires that at least one cochlear implant friendly slide be placed on each play structure.

Visual Challenges

Visual cues or sound orientation for individuals with visual impairments is also not considered a necessity for public playgrounds. Some simple but overlooked examples of how to address these needs would be providing distinguishable color variance or contrasts, Braille, a central trail or walkway through the playground distinguishable from the rest of the surface – such as a cement sidewalk surrounded by poured in place surfacing as typically found through out the rest of the playground. Even sound events or apparatus - such as strategically placed chimes - can help those with visual impairments navigate through a playground.

These are only a few of the major differences between building an ADA compliant playground and an all inclusive Unlimited Play Playground, but for those with disabilities, those differences can mean the inability to play.

We have learned a lot over the years and we continue to learn more about how to design playgrounds that can include everyone. Whether you are a parent, city, school, or business we are excited that you realize the need for playgrounds that allow all children to play and interact together.

Play is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child.

Getting Started:

1. Form a Committee

Regardless of whether your budget is \$50,000 or a \$1,000,000, building an Unlimited Play playground will be a big challenge. But remember, the rewards are immeasurable. Start by organizing a committee of people to work with you on this project. How large your committee is and who is on it will typically depend on the size of playground you want to build.

For smaller scale projects your committee can be as small as 3 or 4 people. For larger projects you will want a committee from 5-10 people with varying specialties.

You will want to look for a variety of individuals who will each bring a different skill and perspective to your design. As a recommendation you should include:

- Parents/Caregivers with and without children with special needs
- Occupational, physical, developmental, and/or speech therapists
- Business leaders with connections within the community
- Individuals with fundraising experience
- Public relations specialists
- Accountants
- Lawyers
- Construction Project Managers

Now you are ready to begin looking for your ideal place to build your playground. Begin by approaching all cities within your local community. Share with them your goal to build a playground for all children. Often people have a hard time understanding what exactly an all inclusive playground is. Unlimited Play's video will help you share your vision of allowing all kids to play together.

As you approach different cities ask if they already have plans to update an existing playground or construct a new playground within the next couple years. Partnering with a city to build within an existing park is ideal.

2. Location

Look for a city that is willing to not only provide land to build on, but also contribute financially. Let them know this playground will become a source of community pride and a potential tax revenue generator as patrons of the playground will typically also use local retail shops, restaurants, and gas stations.

The measure of a great community is the legacy it leaves for its children. Help them realize that legacy.

How to choose which city to work with:

- Existing park—building within an existing park can often cut project costs dramatically. Look for a place with existing restrooms and water supply.
- Land that has existing hills that can be used for a berm to reduce ramping requirements
- Location—this playground will draw families from up to an hour away. A location that is easily accessible to a freeway or main road is ideal.
- Evaluate the city's commitment and excitement about your project. If they are not excited and cooperative from the start, it will only get harder as the project progresses.

3. Contract

A contract between your organization and the city or private entity is vital. This contract needs to outline where the playground will be built, the amount of land you can build on, what financial responsibilities each party has, timelines and milestones for project completion, maintenance plans and promises, and project management responsibilities.

4. Design Phase:

You are finally ready to begin designing your dream playground. There are several vendors capable of building an all inclusive playground. When choosing a vendor there are a few things that will help determine what vendor you will want to build with.

- a. Can the company customize? This is often needed to make a playground wheelchair accessible. Will they only let you choose from a catalogue, or are they willing to modify or build something from scratch based off your specific requirements. For example: a castle themed playground from a catalogue will typically not have doorways that are wide enough for wheelchairs to enter. Are they willing to modify that?
- b. Can they theme? This is important to help children who have difficulty in creating imaginative play on their own. It can also help mask the appearance that it is just a bunch of ramps. More importantly, we have found that theme gives the playground an identity and personality. It is

not just that one playground in the park. The playground becomes a destination place.

- c. What does the company provide to serve the needs of children with cochlear implants other than basic metal slides?
- d. What unique features are provided with high play value and accessibility

Make sure you are working with vendor(s) that are willing to include **all** of Unlimited Play's design requirements.

5. Fundraising/Community Engagement

Community Engagement is an essential component that will lead to success in bringing a universally accessible playground to your community. Bringing key players to the table will help you raise the awareness and resources needed. A diversified fundraising approach is critical during these tough economic times.

Community Engagement is about creating the momentum that inspires people and groups to get involved in your project. Remember, inspired/engaged people invest both money and time.

- a.) Form a separate fundraising/community engagement committee with representatives from the various community sectors. Consider including people from local organizations (schools, other social service agencies), corporate leaders, elected officials, service club members, media affiliates, and of course parents of children with disabilities.
- b) Schedule a session to discuss why your community needs this universally accessible playground. Take some time to collect pertinent data that will help strengthen your case for support. Some of the questions you may want to answer are:
 - Currently, where is the nearest universally accessible playground?
 - Approximately how many children with disabilities reside in your community? How many adults?
 - What are some testimonials from parents regarding their experiences with typical playgrounds?
- c) Spend some time identifying some viable "partners" for your project. Partners include players (people who will advocate on your behalf) and funders. What are some large companies who employ residents? Are there any companies who specialize in services/products for people with disabilities (have a "natural" fit with your cause?) Who are some of the movers and shakers in the community? What other social sector groups share your mission to enrich the lives of children?
- d) Make a list of potential fundraisers that can help you raise both funds and awareness. Often fundraisers are labor intensive but can yield results in "friend" raisers as well as generate non-restrictive dollars. Are there any groups who hold 3rd party fundraisers that are willing to raise funds on your behalf? Community

Service organizations are well known for designating charities to benefit from their special events.

e) Strategize tactics to raise awareness about your efforts. Make a list of community events that can help you showcase your project. Are there any special parades or fairs? Create a calendar of potential events for the next year.

f) Review your outlined efforts and designate the opportunity for volunteers? How many people? What are some specific duties? Can you utilize interns or high school classes such as DECA or Student Council?

g) Lastly, holding a fundraising kick off, ground breaking, community build, and ribbon cutting events are key to keeping your community engaged throughout your project.

***REMEMBER UNLIMITED PLAY IS AVAILABLE
TO HELP THROUGHOUT YOUR PROJECT***